HARD COPY IN CASE IT'S HELPFUL

A Brief History of Point Foundation

In the hopes it will help us think about Point's mission and future, here is a highly selective overview of Point's origins and history, in words written for public consumption—MKS

1968: The Whole Earth Catalog

The original *Whole Earth Catalog* (10 3/4," x 14 1/2," first printing, 1,000 copies) was published under the auspices of Portola Institute.

Stewart Brand later described its genesis:

> I was returning to California from my father's long dying and funeral that morning in Illinois. The sun had set ahead of the plane while I was reading *Spaceship Earth* by Barbara Ward. Between chapters I gazed out the window into dark nothing and slid into a reverie about my friends who were starting their own civilization hither and yon in the sticks and how could I help. The L.L.. Bean Catalog of outdoor stuff came to mind and I pondered upon Mr. Bean's service to humanity over the years. So many of the problems I could identify came down to a matter of access. Where to buy a windmill. Where to get good information on bee-keeping. Where to lay hands on a computer without forfeiting freedom. . .
>
> Shortly I was fantasizing access service. A Truck Store, maybe traveling around with information and samples of what was worth getting and information where to get it. A Catalog too, continuously updated, in part by the users. A Catalog of goods that owed nothing to the suppliers and everything to the users. It would be something I could put some years into.
>
> Amid the fever I was in by this time, I remembered Fuller's admonition that you have about 10 minutes to act on an idea before it recedes back into dreamland. I started writing on the end papers of Barbara Ward's book (never did finish reading it).

The inside cover of the first *Catalog* included a Function . . .

> The WHOLE EARTH CATALOG functions as an evaluation and access device. With it, the reader should know better what is worth getting and where and how to do the getting.
>
> An item is listed in the CATALOG if it is deemed:
>
> 1) Useful as a tool,
> 2) Relevant to independent education,
> 3) High quality or low cost,
> 4) Easily available by mail.
>
> CATALOG listings are continually revised according to the experience and suggestions of CATALOG users and staff.

. . . and a Purpose:

> We are as gods and might as well get good at it. So far remotely done power and glory — as via government, big business, formal education, church — has succeeded to the point where gross defects obscure actual gains. In response to this dilemma and to these gains a realm of intimate, personal power is developing — power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his

> own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested. Tools that aid this process are sought and promoted by the *Whole Earth Catalog*.

The book's domains included Whole Systems, Shelter and Land Use, Community, Communications, Industry and Craft, Nomadics, and Learning.

1969: The *Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalog*

The *Supplement* began life as "The Difficult But Possible Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalog," bridging the spaces between *Catalog* publications.

1969: Liferaft Earth

From a five-page report in the *Last Whole Earth Catalog*:

> The event . . . was designed as a game. Its intent was to make very personal the matter of population control. The stadium was the news media, so a certain amount of theatre (i.e. plot) was designed in.
>
> The few rules, announced far in advance of the event, were: a lot of people stay publicly together for a week without eating. Anybody may leave anytime, but may not return; their departure is considered a death. . . .
>
> Publicly, it was a failure. We lost the focus of the plastic pillow and we lost the focus of staying in one place. But internally among the starvers, we connected with our bodies, with each other, with the Depression generation, with the Third World, and with the future in ways and depths that we're still sorting out.

1971: *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*

In 1969, Stewart wrote:

> Plans change, but at this writing our plan is to cease publication of the *Whole Earth Catalog* in the Spring of 1971. . . . If by that time there aren't people and ideas around doing a better job than us, then we'll have failed: we won't have replaced ourselves. Most likely though we'll be obsolescent and in the way, and our departure will be the occasion for sighs of relief and a party."

The *Last Whole Earth Catalog* was born. The party was held. Point Foundation was founded to disburse the accumulated funds. In 1972 The *Last Whole Earth Catalog* won the National Book Award. Sales approached two million.

1971: The *Whole Earth Catalog* Demise Party

As told by Stewart Brand in the *Whole Earth Epilog*, 1974. For a more complete rendering, see Michael Phillips' *The Seven Laws of Money*:

> In June 1971, we had the Demise Party celebrating the self-termination of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, and all in all it was a rout. 1500 people showed up. . . . And then at midnight Scott Beach announced from the stage that these two hundred $100 dollar bills, yes, $20,000, were now the property of the party-goers, just as soon as they could decide what to do with them.

"Flush them down the toilet!" No, don't!" "Give it to the Indians!" "Bangladesh!" "Our commune needs a pump or we'll all get hepatitis!" And so on. The debate lasted till 9 a.m. the next morning, when a dozen remaining hardcore turned the remaining $15,000 ($5,000 had been distributed to the crowd at one wild point) over to Fred Moore, dishwasher. Fred later gathered people for other group decidings over what to do with the money that worked out damn well.

On the question of the *Whole Earth Catalog's* finances, Stewart had this to say several years later:

> The problem was How to Generate a Low-Maintenance High-Yield Self-Sustaining Critical Information Center.
>
> Easy. You name what you know if good stuff and indicate exactly where to get it. You do this on newsprint, which costs 1/2 the next higher page stock. Low overhead every step. Employ stone amateurs with energy and enthusiasm. . . . Pay your pros $5/hr (no raises) and the beginners $2/hr with 25¢/hr. raises every couple months. . . .
>
> As Fuller advises: Always promise less than you deliver, and let customers, business associates, staff come to their own conclusions about you. Small business is based on earned trust. Send cash-with-order in your first dealings with another firm. Pay bills scrupulously on time. Keep exact, open books on all your accounting. Small businessmen respond faster to honesty than any other kind of person: most of them couldn't care less what you wear, smoke, or think, if you're straight with them and don't care what they wear, smoke, or think. . . .
>
> Our stopping is primarily an economic experiment. Rather than do the usual succession things we prefer to just cease supply, let demand create its own new sources. Our hope is that those sources will be more diverse and better than we have been or could have been if we continued.
>
> There's money in this business. We made some in spite of ourselves. To really clean up we could have:
>
> > Had a private sale of stock at the beginning like *Rolling Stone* and Zomeworks.
> >
> > Sold expensive advertising space in the CATALOG.
> >
> > Kept the cover price at $4.
> >
> > Gone for mass distribution.
> >
> > Franchised Whole Earth Truck Stores around the world.
> >
> > Developed a line of Whole Earth Tools.
> >
> > Sold the name and momentum of the CATALOG for a princely sum.

Point is Born

Stewart again, from *CoEvolution Quarterly* No. 2, Summer, 1974:

> POINT was set up — with *Last Whole Earth Catalog* income — to be an anti-foundation. Active rather than passive (directors find projects, not vice versa). Individual rather than committee (directors each have $55,000/year — when there's money — to spend on their own). Interested in originality. Preferring to

give to individuals. Spend the capital and the interest. Three-year kick-out for all directors. Major criterion of successful grant: enjoyment.

Whole Earth Epilog, see above:

> We funded quickly and without fuss, usually preferring to do without proposals and such. We held board meetings on salmon boats at sea, in tipis, in Glide's sex room, at the Black Panther school in Oakland. And our grants were maybe no worse than other people's. . . . Huey Johnson and Jerry Mander, who fought constantly, were the best funders. . . . The main lesson I learned was: it's not enough to give money to someone who's very good. They must also be in the grip of an overwhelming idea which is very good. Otherwise, a hideous paralysis will take them over and, in addition, freeze your friendship.

[Point awarded $361,024 and $282,517 in its first two seasons, then went into debt itself and borrowed money to print the *Whole Earth Epilog*. A list of grantees can be found in *CoEvolution Quarterly* No. 2, Summer, 1974.]

1974: The *Whole Earth Catalog* is Resurrected as the *Whole Earth Epilog*

Stewart, writing in the *Whole Earth Epilog*:

> "EDITOR BREAKS PROMISE," we began.
>
> Some explanation is owed. In May 1971 we ceased making *Whole Earth Catalogs* forever sincerely enough on the expectation that someone would quickly come along and fill the niche better than we did. Well,
>
> 1) They didn't;
> 2) The *Last Whole Earth Catalog* continued to sell 5,000 copies a week with increasingly outdated information;
> 3) The North American economy began to lose its mind, putting more people in need of tools for independence and the economy as a whole in need of greater self-reliance; and
> 4) After burning our bridges we reported before the Throne to announce, "We're here for our next terrific idea." The Throne said, "That Was It."

1974: *CoEvolution Quarterly*

From the *Whole Earth Epilog:*

> The *CoEvolution Quarterly* got its name late in the game. I had been wanting to call it "The Never Piss Against the Wind Newsletter", or perhaps "Making Circuit." I did have a formula in mind: we would print long technical pieces on whatever interested us—the opposite of the predigested pap in, say, *Intellectual Digest*. So the spring *CQ* had Paul Ehrlich on Co-evolution, Roy Rappaport and Howard Odum on energy and culture, Sam Keen on spiritual tyranny, and a nice reception from readers.

From the inside cover:

> It seems that all evolution is coevolution. The beauty of the term is what it adds to the concepts of ecology. Language such as "preserving the ecology" suggests something quite perfect—static, knowable, oriented backward, unwelcoming to human foolishness. . . unreal. Ecology is whole system alright, but coevolution is

whole system in TIME. The health of it is forward—systemic self-education which feeds on constant imperfection. We coevolving watchers and meddlers are not left out of it.

Ecology maintains.
Coevolution learns.

1976: World Biogeographical Provinces Map

Point issued a graphical bioregionalist manifesto: the self-portrait the earth might paint.

1978: *Space Colonies* and *Soft Tech*

Point published two books the same year, a serious consideration and critique of proposals for living in space and a look at applied state-of-the-art technology, circa 1978.

Whole Earth Jamboree, August 26-28, 1978

Whole Earth celebrated its first ten years with a weekend festival for 8,000 or so friends in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area just north of San Francisco. New Games, booths, an encampment for Whole Earth veterans, speeches — limited by Stewart's fiat to five minutes each — by 60 luminaries. Reflecting about two months later on the event and the obstacles thrown up by so-called "environmentalists," Stewart Brand concluded (*CQ* No. 20; winter, 1978):

> The idea of the 5-minute speeches at the Jamboree was somewhat strange, and it worked fine. The speakers adapted gracefully, said interesting things, and the audience stayed large through less interesting talks and lesser known speakers because of the format. So that was okay, and the people to work with were outstanding, the best ever, and the event went nicely.
>
> But I'm discontent with the Jamboree. . . .The Jamboree was not worth fighting for. It wasn't an idea, it was a reflex based on the non-event of Ten Years. Ten Years doesn't have anything to do with anything. It's an excuse. Why do we need excuses?
>
> What lessons do I draw from the Jamboree battle and the clarifying exercise of writing it all up? I will do no more public events no matter how nice. A project would have to be strange enough to have no organized set of ideological allies to try to destroy it, because once they try they succeed, even if they fail.

Meanwhile, also in *CQ* No. 20, Anne Herbert (who had been negative about the event from the beginning) wrote,

> You can imagine my surprise at finding out two months later that I now feel negative about the Jamboree for a whole new reason. I think it was such a good thing that it is almost criminal to do it only once. This does not change the fact that if Stewart announced he was going to do another Jamboree, I would immediately apply for a job with *Reader's Digest*. But I really believe that the kind of good feeling that was there present was designed to happen on some kind of continuing and regular basis.
>
> The feeling at the Jamboree wasn't a high (that's why some people found it a let down), but was very strong pleasant. It was in fact a neighborhood feeling — a relaxation and ease among a community that had temporarily become a community. . . . I was surprised, and almost shocked, to find a neighborhood I

liked at the Jamboree since I've always thought *CQ* readers were pure and more intense and more irritable than I. I wasn't at all sure that I'd like to be around a bunch of them for two days.

It turned out that the *CQ* people who write to the office may often be more like unfun true believers than my friends but the people at the Jamboree stunned me their wonderfulness, and made me wish we could have hung out together longer, or more frequently.

1980: The *Next Whole Earth Catalog*

Point's heftiest endeavor ever at 608 pages, five pounds, and 2,700 items, followed a year later by a 3,907-item second edition. The effort to produce the behemoth displaced work on *CQ* Number 27, and 24,000 subscribers receive the huge book as their fall issue.

Hackers' Conference: 1984

Stewart Brand, *Whole Earth Review* No. 46, May, 1985:

I think hackers — dedicated, innovative computer programmers — are the most interesting and effective body of intellectuals since the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

No other group that I know of has set out to liberate a technology and succeeded. They not only did so against the active disinterest of corporate America, their successes forced corporate America to adopt their style in the end. In reorganizing the Information Age around the individual, via personal computers, the hackers may well have saved the American economy. High tech is now something that mass consumers do, rather than just have done to them, and that's a hot item in the world. . . .

Some of the shyer people you'll ever meet, hackers are also some of the funniest. The standard memory of the Hackers' Conference is of three days and two long nights of nonstop hilarity. These supposed lone wolves, proud artistes, in fact collaborate with glee. . . .

It was set up as an invitational conference, no featured speakers, minimal budget: all participants paid the same $90 for food and lodging and conference no matter how much or how little they used.

Knowing we had facilities for 150, over 400 hackers were invited in three waves. That became a saga of its own — identifying the right 400, getting current addresses and phones of a slippery crowd, getting them to respond (many ignore mail and phone). But once they were on the scene, they were the world's easiest group to work with. If anything went wrong, 1) they didn't care, 2) they could fix it. Staff, volunteers, participants, and press (20 knowledgeable computer reporters were invited) blended into one energetic population.

1984: The *Whole Earth Software Catalog 1.0*; the *Whole Earth Software Review*; the *Whole Earth Review*

Point attempted paper-published software reviewing. After three issues, The *Whole Earth Software Review* was absorbed into *CQ* to become the *Whole Earth Review*:

As usual, the decision began with distress. The Point Foundation Board of Directors, doing its job, said that our computer magazine, the quarterly *Whole Earth Software Review* was pissing away what's left of the million-buck advance

we got from Doubleday for the *Whole Earth Software Catalog*. The *Review* was a good little magazine getting steadily better, but in the ferociously competitive and overpopulated field of computer magazines, it couldn't afford the time and promotion it would take to find its audience and break even (60,000 subscribers required — versus the 9,000 we had).

Gloom. Financial officer Paul Hawken brooded for a couple weeks and then made the kind of suggestion we retain him for. "Don't kill the *Software Review*. Blend the best of it into *CoEvolution*. Find a new title if need be. Use the money saved to make the new magazine even better, and promote it properly."

. . . What would a 'better still' *CQ* look, feel, read like? Would our computer enthusiasm and new expertise feel dragged in, or would "computers in context" be closer to what we've been after all along? Personal computers are tools, in wider general use these days than most tools that *CQ* covers. Computers are still conceptual news, bending the culture in odd and mostly wonderful ways. Why isolate? One good reason: people who hate them really *hate* them — "narcotic little screens and false intelligence" [Joe Kane]. Fine; we'll print what's hateful about computers as well.) . . .

So far the new magazine looks like this. Title: *Whole Earth Review*. Subtitle: "Tools and Ideas for the Computer Age" . . .

The WELL: 1985

Stewart Brand, *Whole Earth Review* No. 47, July, 1985:

Regional computer networks like The WELL (it stands for, no snickering, Whole Earth Lectronic Link) are just barely existent now — there's one in Ann Arbor, Michigan, one in Colorado Springs, one coming in Toronto, that's all — but I'll wager they're common in metropolitan areas by this time next year. They are such odd and addicting facilities. It's as if the coffee house, the bookstore, and the telephone had all been invented and made into one starkly new communication medium. Take the rampant enthusiasm you find on the national networks like CompuServe and The Source, the populist expertise of local computer user groups, and the wild wooliness of bulletin board systems, then add the no-nonsense zeal of a multitude of small businesses looking for the cheapest/best tool for their regional communications, blend, and duck. . . .

Does all this portent more computer stuff in the *Whole Earth Review*? I doubt it; better computer stuff, maybe, but in the magazine as in life, computers are blending in with other tools, some traditional, some even more glitzy-popular like VCRs and video disks, some providing new advantage to small business, like laser printers. None too soon. The mind WAS running away from the body.

1986: *The Essential Whole Earth Catalog* and *News That Stayed News*

J. Baldwin, edited the chunky (416 pages, 8 1/2" x 11") compilation of the best of 18 years of Catalog publishing. With development supported by Apple Computer, Inc., Point and Broderbund Software issued *EWEC* two years later as a Hyper Card CD-ROM, "The Electronic Whole Earth Catalog." Music reviews with samples, birding fieldbooks with birdcalls. The technology succeeded, but too few people owned CD-ROM players to support the $153 product.

Art Kleiner and Stewart Brand edited *News That Stayed News: Ten Years of CoEvolution Quarterly*, an anthology of *CQ's* greatest hits.

1988: *Signal: Communication Tools for the Information Age; The Fringes of Reason: A Field Guide to New Age Frontiers, Unusual Beliefs and Eccentric Sciences*

After nearly 20 years of light tables, paste-up, wax and razor blades, Point moved into desktop publishing with *Signal*, edited by Kevin Kelly and *The Fringes of Reason*, edited by Ted Schultz.

Cyberthon: October 6-7, 1990

Richard Kadrey, Whole Earth Review No. 70, Spring, 1991:

> The Whole Earth Institute built a ten-foot-high maze in the main soundstage of Colossal Pictures in San Francisco, transforming the place into "Cyberthon," a 24-hour virtual-reality marathon, conference, fair, exposition and running debate. . . .
>
> After twenty-four straight hours, most Cyberthoners were running on sugar, caffeine and pure adrenaline. Personal realities were shifting without the aid of machines. When it was over, Cyberthon was being called everything from "the Acid Test of the Nineties" to "Nerdstock." It was a preview of an embryonic technology that promises to turn what we normally call "reality" inside out. Cyberthon participants got the answer to the question, "Where is virtual reality right now?" but better yet, they came away with new questions, like "How do we define reality when we can each shape our own?," "Who will control VR technology?," and "What happens to transportation, telecommunications and the human body when you can direct whole areas of your life from inside your computer?"

1990: *Whole Earth Ecolog*

Editor J. Baldwin took the *Whole Earth Catalog* back to its classic 10 3/4" x 14 1/2" size with a catalog devoted wholly to environmental and ecological matters.

1991: *Helping Nature Heal*

Edited by Richard Nilsen, *HNH* combined the usual reviews of tools and resources with extended vignettes of soul-restoration by means of Earth-restoration.

1994: *The Millennium Whole Earth Catalog*

Editor Howard Rheingold and the crew offered access to tools and ideas for the twenty-first century in a new, comprehensive tour of 14 domains including, for the first time, Biodiversity, Sustainability, Sex, Family and Taming Technology.

Howard, in the Introduction:

> Some people who are taking the world in their hands are out in the rainforests. Many world-changers are in cities and suburbs. Others are in cyberspace. Here are the field reports, recommendations, and reviews from the ethnobotanists in the Amazon and the cybernauts of the Internet.

Finally, did Santayana have an opinion as to whether those who do know history are condemned to repeat it anyway? Some quotes from *WERs* past:

> 1985: We do our best to be a self-sustaining magazine. As any reader of our financial statements (openly published at the end of each issue) knows, this magazine loses money each issue. . . . It's time for us to solicit money to continue publishing. Public television regularly, and unapologetically, fundraises in order to operate each year. Now, for the first time, we are asking for contributions in order not to close down.

1990: A most refreshing thing happened a few months ago. The entire staff of Whole Earth daydreamed together for two days. . . . Coming up with definition of who we are was the most tortuous and least successful thing we attempted. We made a list of 59 terms we tend to use about ourselves, but few of them would really stick under scrutiny. When we try to promote this magazine, we fail to come up with an adequate phrase to convey to strangers what happens here. To say that the magazine is continually trying to re-invent itself is true, but a cliché. Someone on the staff suggested that WER is a "niche-resistant: magazine — we don't fill niches, we discover and define them." Stewart pointed out that we are a magazine most challenging to its own readers — the "attractive nuisance" publication. Other known Whole Earth traits: unpredictable, contradicts itself, heeds its own mind, ruled by untamed curiosity, seeks solutions, liable to bash its heroes, unashamedly pragmatic, and operationally transparent. . . . Here are some other suggestions of "who we are" from people on the WELL:

> Point is/should be a high-priced connection. It's where you go when you don't know where to go.

Point points out the interesting part of what you're *not* thinking about.

It's for following the fringes that become central as we move forward.

Uncommon ideas to build a common understanding and a common-unity.

1992, Howard Rheingold: "In 1990 Kelly Teevan became Executive Director of Point and focused our attention on the business infrastructure that had grown around these cultural experiments. He made clear what many had suspected: the magazine is the heart of the enterprise, and it has survived through miracles that won't be repeated and can't be continued . . ."

1992, Kelly Teevan: "Day One for me at Whole Earth: I learned that Whole Earth had $20,000 in cash and not the $60,000 I had believed. Day Two: I learned we lost money at the rate of $7,000 a month. . . . I am leaving Whole Earth. I regret I will not be able to finish the job I was asked to do. I did not have the support necessary to carry out my job; in my view, the task of making the organization functional, sustainable, and prosperous was viewed as insufficiently interesting."

1993, John Sumser: "Survival for its own sake, measured in dollars, was the ethic I found as I entered the world of Gate Five Road. 'Doing the right thing' had been forgotten in favor of 'Where's the money coming from?' Internal risk assessments were conservative enough to make a big company blush. . . . After years of defining the problem in financial terms, it's hard for them to hear me say that money is only a symptom. Of all the unlikely places in the world, we have succumbed to the MBA view that issues can and must be quantified. . . . I have made one of the few overt editorial decisions I plan to make: we will not beg again. Pandering for money has cost us dearly in self-respect. We will bore you no more with begging."

1994, John Sumser: "For environmental and economic reasons, we're eliminating junk mail from our tactics. We will send you only two renewal notices instead of seven. . . . We've also stopped using direct mail as a way to generate new subscribers. . . . From a